



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

❖THE❖OLD❖TESTAMENT❖STUDENT.❖

VOL. V.

SEPTEMBER, 1885.

NO. I.

SOME FEATURES OF HEBREW POETRY.

BY PROFESSOR EDWARD L. CURTIS,

Presbyterian Theological Seminary of the North West, Chicago.

Hebrew Poetry is usually characterized first as religious. This is its grand and glorious distinction, to present the sublimest of all themes, God and his relation to man. Heavenly choirs as well as earthly repeat its thought, if not its words. For this it is chiefly worthy of study. But not all Hebrew Poetry was religious. There were bacchanalian songs of revelry.¹ Isaiah quotes as well known the song of the harlot.² Dirges were lamented over the dead which contained not one religious thought. Such are the two of David over Jonathan and Abner.³ They are purely secular, though the former is of great pathos and beauty. Of those sung by Hebrew maidens over Jephtha's daughter we have no knowledge.⁴ We also have the song of the well, chanted doubtless by the women drawing water.⁵ And the smith, in those days when there was one, may have sung at his forge the ungodly sword song of Lamech.⁶ There were songs of marriage feasts in praise of maidens,⁷ songs of the times of the vintage,⁸ songs to welcome the warrior returning home.⁹ Love, too, was not forgotten. The Song of Songs may have been in its origin one of many poems designed to set forth simply human passion. But being so beautiful a masterpiece, it may thus have been taken as an illustration of Jehovah's love, which so often had been likened by the prophet to the same, and thus found a place among the sacred writings. How suggestive also are the titles of some of the Psalms, if they contain, as is held by many, catch words of songs giving names to melodies. Then there was a song beginning, "Hind of the dawn,"¹⁰ another, "The silent dove in the far off land,"¹¹ and a warlike song of Gath,¹² a

¹ Isa. v., 12; Amos vi., 5. ² Isa. xxiii., 16. ³ 2 Sam. i., 19-27; iii., 33, 34. ⁴ Judg. xi., 40. ⁵ Num. xxi., 17, 18. ⁶ Gen. iv., 23, 24. ⁷ Ps. lxxviii., 63. ⁸ Judg. xxi., 21. ⁹ 1 Sam. xviii., 7. ¹⁰ Ps. xxii., 1. ¹¹ Ps. lvi., 1. ¹² Ps. viii., 1.

marseillaise, sung in all probability by David's faithful mercenaries. Indeed everything which moved the heart of the multitude found expression in Hebrew Poetry.

But though varied in subject matter, Hebrew Poetry is noticeable for its simplicity. This is shown in its external form; there is no metre, no rhyme, only rythm, which belongs to the best prose, and a certain uniformity in the length and structure of lines, and the balancing of the thought of one line over against another,—parallelism. Hence, often no strict line of separation can be drawn between Hebrew Poetry and prose, and no poetry probably suffers less by translation. This simplicity adapts it for being the vehicle of the sublimest thought. What simpler than the utterance :

God said,
Let there be light, and there was light.¹

What simpler in expression than Ps XIX.:

The heavens declare the glory of God,
And the firmament sheweth his handiwork.
Day unto day uttereth speech,
Night unto night declareth knowledge;
There is no speech nor language.
Their voice is not heard.

What grander? What more sublime than these? Compare this latter with a modern treatment of the same theme.

Alone by the waves, starry midnight on high,
O'er the sea not a mist, not a cloud in the sky,
I stood, and beyond the seen world I had sight;
And the woods, and the hills, and all Nature seemed stirred,
Confusedly, plaintively, asking a word
Of the ocean's dumb tide, of the heavenly light.
Then the fiery planets, an infinite host,
Loud, faint, as their myriad harmonies crossed,
Spake, each bowing down with his circlet of gold:
And spake the blue flood that no hand shall arrest,
Inclining superbly its foam-jeweled crest:
"Behold the Lord God! The Eternal behold!"

This last of Victor Hugo is fine, very fine, but it will be forgotten, while the simple Hebrew melody will live on forever.

Take another example, Ps. XXIX. One on a first reading probably would not be struck with it in any way except that it was full of repetitions that seemed almost childish. But let one study it more carefully and he will find it artistic and most sublime. It is a description of a thunder storm.

¹ Gen. i., 3.

There is first a prelude, where we have an angel or priestly chorus praising God.

Give unto Jehovah, O ye sons of God,
Give unto Jehovah glory and strength.
Give unto Jehovah the glory due his name.
Worship Jehovah in holy vestments.

Then follow three strophes describing the storm. The first gives us its beginning, the low faint muttering thunder in the heavens.

The voice of Jehovah is upon the waters,
The God of Glory thundereth;
Jehovah is upon many waters;
The voice of Jehovah is in might,
The voice of Jehovah is in majesty.

Then follows the description of the storm at its height, when it crashes the cedars and shakes the mountains.

The voice of Jehovah breaketh the cedars,
Yea, Jehovah breaketh the cedars of Lebanon;
And he maketh them to skip like a calf,
Lebanon and Sirion like the young of the wild ox.
The voice of Jehovah cleaveth flames of fire.

Then we are told how with one long peal after another the storm dies away off in the wilderness and forest to the south.

The voice of Jehovah maketh the wilderness to tremble;
Jehovah maketh the wilderness of Kadesh to tremble;
The voice of Jehovah boweth the hinds in travail pangs,
And strippeth the forest of their leaves,
And in his temple all that are therein cry, "Glory."

Then there is another strophe in conclusion, a beautiful summary of all.

Jehovah sat enthroned above the flood.
Yea, Jehovah sitteth enthroned a king forever.
Jehovah giveth strength to his people;
Jehovah blesseth his people with peace.

Thus out of the mighty convulsions of nature we have this beautiful ending of peace. The psalm truly begins, as one has said, with a *gloria in excelsis* and ends with a *pax in terris*.¹

This psalm leads us to speak of the poetic treatment of nature. The Hebrews were a people of outdoor life, and given to lively impression. This is shown by their language. Their vocabulary is relatively small, yet there is a profusion of sensuous epithets. More than 250 botanical names appear in the Old Testament. There are

¹ In this translation and analysis of Ps. xxix., I have followed Perowne. See his Commentary.

nearly as many words about sea and water as the English language can muster when technicalities are reckoned. There are five, if not seven, distinct names of the lion. Hence their poetry abounds in allusions to the external world. We are impressed with this in every poem we read. The godly is like a tree planted by the rivers.¹ The wicked are like the chaff driven by the wind.² The wicked are a lion longing to tear in pieces.³ A young lion lurking in secret places.⁴ Man's troubles are waves and billows.⁵ The place of his distress is the pit.⁶ It is the flood that beareth man away.⁷ He is as grass; in the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.⁸

Intensity of feeling allowed the Hebrew writer to pass quickly from one natural object to another. When Isaiah pictures the onset of Assyria, he hears the roar of the lion as it springs on its victim, followed by the low and awful moan which shows its prey is secured. But presently this moan waxes more and more intense, until it passes into the grim murmur of a storm-lashed sea, while the hot breath and overshadowing terror of the lion are transmuted into a dark and murky storm cloud which enwraps the land of Judæa in the gloom of hopeless night.

His roar is like the lioness,
He roars like the young lions,
And moans, and clutches his prey and bears it off, and none can save.
He moans over Judah like the moan of the sea.
When they looked to the land, lo stifling gloom, and day grown black in lowering clouds.⁹

But nature was more than a store-house of similes and metaphors, bright colors to clothe each passing thought. Nature seemed really a part of man. Its destiny was inseparably linked with his. Man sins. Cursed is the ground for his sake. Man is redeemed. The mountains and hills break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field clap their hands. When misfortune and calamity befall, the sun is turned into darkness and the moon into blood. There appears an inalienable connection between the course of nature and the progress of the divine kingdom. The earth throbs and pulsates in correspondence to human weal and woe.

And it will be in that day,
I will answer, saith the Lord,
Will answer the heavens,

¹ Ps. i., 3. ² Ps. i., 4. ³ Ps. x., 9. ⁴ Ps. xvii., 12. ⁵ Ps. xlii., 7. ⁶ Ps. lxix., 15. ⁷ Ps. xc., 5. ⁸ Ps. xc., 6.

⁹ Isa. v., 30. Translation and illustration given by W. Robertson Smith, in *British Quarterly*, January, 1877.

And they will answer the earth,
 And the earth will answer the corn and the wine and the oil,
 And they will answer Jezreel.¹

Nature must thus respond. Eyes refused to see what heart could not assimilate. No beauty of smiling fields must stand in contrast to grief and sorrow.

Ye mountains of Gilboa,
 No dew no rain be upon you,
 For the shield of the mighty lies rusting,
 The shield of Saul not anointed with oil.²

Nature must join in every emotion.

Hallelujah.
 Praise Jehovah from the earth,
 Ye dragons and all ye ocean depths;
 Fire and hail, snow and smoke,
 Stormy wind fulfilling his word;
 Mountains and all hills;
 Fruit trees and all cedars.³

But nature was never viewed for her own sake. She had no independent self-existence. The word nature or its equivalent does not appear in Hebrew. She was an outer garment of the Almighty. All her movements were of him. And when he moved, it was through her power and force. One prophet, it is true, found the Lord not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire. But this was his usual form of manifestation. Out of the whirlwind he answered Job. The thunder was his voice,⁴ the lightning came from his mouth,⁵ the earthquake was his anger,⁶ the light his garment,⁷ the clouds his chariot, the winds his messengers,⁸ the ice came from his breath.¹⁰ He was enthroned above the cherubim, symbols of the living powers of nature.

But God is never identified with nature. He giveth life to all, is the life of all, is in all natural phenomena, but is independent, apart, separate, and Lord of all. No natural scene or object is ever pictured for its own sake, to leave the impression of itself alone. Beauty of form, harmony of color, were conceptions foreign to the Hebrews. Ezekiel's Cherubim defy artistic representation. The creations of Job, his magnificent description of a war-horse, for example, suggest no pictorial treatment. Indeed it may rather be said to defy such treatment. Can we conceive of a picture under which could be written:

Hast thou given the horse his might?
 Hast thou clothed his neck with the quivering mane?

¹ Hos. ii., 21, 22. ² 2 Sam. i., 21. ³ Ps. cxlviii., 1a, 7-9. ⁴ Ps. xxix., 3. ⁵ Ps. xviii., 8. ⁶ Ps. xviii., 7. ⁷ Ps. civ., 2. ⁸ Ps. civ., 3. ⁹ civ., 4. ¹⁰ Job xxxvii., 10.

Hast thou made him to leap as a locust ?
 The glory of his snorting is terrible.
 He paweth in the valley and rejoiceth in strength ;
 He goeth out to meet the armed men.
 He mocketh at fear, and is not dismayed ;
 Neither turneth he back from the sword.
 The quiver rattleth against him,
 The flashing spear and javelin.
 He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage ;
 Neither believeth he that it is the voice of the trumpet.
 So oft as the trumpet soundeth he saith, Aha !
 And he smelleth the battle afar off,
 The thunder of the captains, and the shouting.¹

While how easy to place beneath a portrait and recognize as a true likeness Barry Cornwall's description of the Blood Horse.

Gamara is a dainty steed,
 Strong, black, and of a noble breed,
 Full of fire, and full of bone,
 With all his line of fathers known ;
 Fine his nose, his nostril thin,
 But blown abroad by the pride within ;
 His mane is like a river flowing,
 And his eyes like embers glowing
 In the darkness of the night,
 And his pace as swift as light.

What a contrast between these two. One is the description of a horse for his own sake, a fit embellishment of a jockey's manual ; the other is given for something higher, the exaltation of the Almighty, a fit embellishment of the Word of God.

As all nature was a manifestation of the divine presence, so was all human action a manifestation of divine power. Man had no strength, no wisdom, no might, which did not come from God. Hence the earliest anthology which is mentioned, while doubtless made up of songs based upon the deeds of men, is called the Book of the Wars of Jehovah.² The victorious march of Israel from the wilderness, and the conquest of Canaan as accomplished by the skill and valor of Joshua and his warriors, is forgotten in poetry. It is only remembered as the triumphal entry of Jehovah, for it is said :

Lord, when thou wentest forth out of Seir,
 When thou marchest forth out of the field of Edom.³

David, leading the charge against some hostile band, or the assault against some tower, scaling the lofty and high battlements, or climb-

¹ Job xxxix., 19. ² Num. xxi., 14. ³ Judg. v., 4.

ing, like the wild goat, precipitous and dangerous mountain side, or bending with mighty arms the bow of bronze, is not one endowed with human strength and skill, but of divine power and schooling.

For by thee I run upon a troop;
And by my God do I leap over a wall.
He maketh my feet like hind's feet;
He setteth me upon my high places.
He teacheth my hands to war;
So that mine arms do bend a bow of brass.¹

There is no thought of personal prowess in David's Psalms. But at the same time there is no belittling man's own dignity and worth. He is viewed, even as he was created in the beginning, a little lower than God, crowned with glory and honor, having dominion, with all things put under his feet.² There are also words which seem too bold for Christian humility and a sense of human weakness and sin.

Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night;
Thou hast tried me and findest nothing.
My steps have held fast to thy paths;
My feet have not slipped.³

But these and other similar expressions spring from no Pharisaic spirit of self-righteousness, but from a just and manly consciousness of one's own integrity and honesty of purpose when contrasted with the wicked.

Hebrew Poetry, then, is all subjective. This is characteristic of the Semitic race, who were not given to analytical reflection, but grasped knowledge by intuition; and in whom feeling and emotion predominated. This is why their poetry is for all time and all peoples. The heart of humanity is found there. No other sacred book has given more of comfort, more of strength, than the Hebrew Psalter. This is not due to its inspiration, although it is inspired. But the church doctrine of inspiration covers also the driest bits of history and the dulllest lists of names, of interest only to the antiquary. This is not because the Psalms are a message from God to men. Although they are God-given, for in general the prophet proclaimed the will of God to men, made known what God is, and what God required. While, on the other hand, the poet proper gave utterance to the longings, aspirations, fears, doubts and anxieties of man's heart. He spoke to God for man. And this is why the Psalter has such a hold and charm over Christian men. It mirrors their feelings. It says just what they would like to say; transfigures their own unuttered thoughts. This, indeed, is the work of poetry, to transfigure life, to

¹ Ps. xviii., 29, 33, 34. ² Ps. viii., 5, 6. ³ Ps. xvii., 2, 3.

give an imaginative representation of what men believe, think, feel, see and do ; and the greatest poet is the one who does the most of this. And because the Psalmist has done so much, he stands pre-eminent among all poets. One need not give illustrations of this. Too many lines of familiar Psalms, repeated oft in joy, in sorrow, in faith, in fear, in praise, in penitence, suggest themselves.

If one, then, will hold communion with the heart of humanity, if he will know its throbbing beats among the people who were chosen to give religion to the world, let him study Hebrew Poetry, let him live in song with their shepherds, warriors, priests and kings, freemen, tillers of their own soil, captives languishing in exile, let him live thus with them and he will hold communion too with God.

THE HISTORICAL ARGUMENT IN THE PENTATEUCH PROBLEM.

BY PROFESSOR GEORGE H. SCHODDE, PH. D.,

Capital University, Columbus, Ohio.

The Pentateuchal sphinx with her riddle still manages to perplex biblical scholars, and the Œdipus with a solution satisfactory to all has not yet put in his appearance. While the day of excitement and fear may be considered past, as far as Kuenen's and Wellhausen's radical protest against the traditional convictions of the synagogue and the church are concerned, we have now entered upon the second stage of the controversy, that of more cool and objective, and hence more effective, refutation of the new hypothesis and its revolutionary conclusions. The run of the debate is as similar to that of Baur and the Tuebingen school in regard to the basal documents of Christianity, as one egg is like another, and the indications are that, as in the former case the gospels and the Christianity of the gospels came forth purified and better established than ever before, thus, too, the outcome of the heated controversy on the character and history of Israel's religion will be a complete vindication of the revelation of God in the Old Testament. Christian scholars should not only not discourage the most searching critical investigations of the sacred records, but should even invite such a discussion. For if the books that claim to be the revelation from God cannot stand the test of a powerful but just critical microscope, then it is time to reject them as false ; if, on the other hand, they are, as we claim them to be, the words of the living God, then such a critical examination can only strengthen their authority.